DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 688 CE 068 821

AUTHOR Kerka, Sandra
TITLE Techniques for Authentic Assessment. Practice Application Brief.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 95
CONTRACT RR93002001
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Adult Students; Career Education; Competency Based Education; Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; *Performance Tests; Portfolio Assessment; Postsecondary Education; Secondary Education; *Student Evaluation; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Authentic Assessment

ABSTRACT

Assessments are authentic when they have meaning in themselves--when the learning they measure has value beyond the classroom and is meaningful to the learner. Authentic assessments (AAs) address the skills and abilities needed to perform actual tasks. Perhaps the most widely used technique is portfolio assessment. Well-designed AAs demonstrate a rich array of what learners know and can do; display products and processes of learning; are adaptable, flexible, ongoing, and cumulative; and allow multiple human judgments of learning. They pose challenges, such as abandoning traditional notions about testing and evaluation, being time consuming to prepare and implement, and requiring special training. AAs are potentially more equitable in accommodating learning styles and acknowledging multiple ways of demonstrating competence. Adult educators find AAs especially appealing as an alternative to the problematic use of standardized tests with adults. Vocational education has a long tradition of activity-based learning and product assessment. Characteristics of good AAs include the following: engaging, meaningful, worthy problems or tasks; real-life applicability; emphasis on product and process; rich, multidimensional, varied formats; opportunities for learner self-evaluation; and fairness in scoring procedures and their application. Collaboration among teachers, employers, community members, and students is essential for the design of high quality AAs. Contains 12 references. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 381 688

Techniques for Authentic Assessment
Practice Application Brief

Sandra Kerka

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

CE 068 821

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

by Sandra Kerka
1995

PRACTICE APPLICATION BRIEF

TECHNIQUES FOR AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

Learning is . . . a dynamic process in which learners actively construct knowledge . . . the acquisition and organization of information into a series of increasingly complex understandings . . . influenced by context (Holt 1992). Educators who view learning in this way realize that quantitative methods of evaluating learners do not "measure up." Authentic forms of assessment present a more qualitative and valid alternative. Authentic assessments (AAs) incorporate a wide variety of techniques "designed to correspond as closely as possible to 'real world' student experiences" (Custer 1994, p. 66). They are compatible with adult, career, and vocational education. After all, apprenticeship is a time-honored form of authentic learning: skills taught in context. "High-performance workplaces" demand critical thinking, self-directed learning, and individual responsibility for career development (Borthwick 1995; Jones 1994)—which the process of AA can develop. This ***Practice Application Brief*** describes types of authentic assessment, explains some of the advantages and challenges they present, and highlights some best practices in design and implementation, with specific examples from adult, career, and vocational education.

What Are AAs?

Assessments are authentic when they have meaning in themselves—when the learning they measure has value beyond the classroom and is meaningful to the learner. AAs address the skills and abilities needed to perform actual tasks. The following are some tools used in authentic assessment (Custer 1994; Lazar and Bean 1991; Reif 1995; Rudner and Boston 1994): checklists (of learner goals, writing/reading progress, writing/reading fluency, learning contracts, etc.); simulations; essays and other writing samples; demonstrations or performances; intake and progress interviews; oral presentations; informal and formal observations by instructors, peers, and others; self-assessments; and constructed-response questions. Students might be asked to evaluate case studies, write definitions and defend them orally, perform role plays, or have oral readings recorded on tape. They might collect writing folders that include drafts and revisions showing changes in spelling and mechanics, revision strategies, and their history as a writer.

Perhaps the most widely used technique is portfolio assessment. Portfolios are a collection of learner work over time. They may include research papers, book reports, journals, logs, photographs, drawings, video and audiotapes, abstracts of readings, group projects, software, slides, test results; in fact, many of the assessment tools listed earlier could have a place in a portfolio. However, the hallmark of a portfolio used for assessment is that the contents are selected by the learner (Hayes et al. 1994). The items are chosen according to a set of standards or objectives connected to the curriculum or learning event. They should represent a documented history of learning and an organized demonstration of accomplishment. Portfolios can serve as a catalyst for reflection on one's growth as a learner and a means of identifying areas for improvement (ibid.). They can serve as a tool for presenting oneself to potential employers (Borthwick 1995; MacIsaac and Jackson 1994).

What's Good about AAs?

Many of these methods are worlds away from traditional tests and grading. What advantages do authentic techniques provide? Well-designed AAs demonstrate a rich array of what learners know and can do; they display both the products and the processes of learning, making learners aware of the processes and encouraging ownership. Authentic assessments are adaptable, flexible, ongoing, and cumulative, depicting learner growth over time (Custer 1994; Holt 1992). Because they should be closely aligned with the curriculum, they connect thinking and doing, theory and practice, in authentic contexts. Assessment should become an integral part of teaching and learning; other learning opportunities may arise during assessment. "The process of assessment is itself a constructivist learning experience, requiring students to apply thinking skills, to understand the nature of high quality performance, and to provide feedback to themselves and others" (Rudner and Boston 1994, p. 7). The feedback and results enable teachers and learners to consider the next steps for improving both teaching and learning.

Although they raise concerns about subjectivity, AAs allow multiple human judgments of learning. Teachers, peer reviewers, and community members may all be involved in various performance ratings, and—a critical element—learners evaluate and monitor themselves. Alternative assessments can accommodate varied learning styles and serve the purposes of instruction, not other reasons for evaluating students (comparing individuals, comparing programs, demonstrating accountability, etc.).

Authentic assessments do pose certain challenges. They require abandoning traditional notions about testing and evaluation and they change teacher and student roles. They are time consuming for teachers to prepare and implement, because they require clarity in goals, outcomes, criteria, and expectations and assurance that all stakeholders understand (Hayes et al. 1994). To ensure that evaluation standards are applied consistently, teachers and other raters need careful training (Borthwick 1995). Students need to be prepared for self-monitoring and reflection (Jones 1994). Some may be more comfortable with the traditional boundaries of grades and testing at set times.

AAs are potentially more equitable in accommodating learning styles and acknowledging multiple ways of demonstrating competence. However, not all schools and districts may have access to some of the resources needed to develop them, and they impose demands that may challenge some students (Rudner and Boston 1994). Authentic assessments do not necessarily have to replace other forms of evaluation but can be used to augment and broaden the picture of learner progress. Jones (1994) cautions, however, that it is a mistake to use authentic techniques such as portfolios while still teaching primarily through traditional methods such as lectures and assigned textbook readings.

Adult, Career, and Vocational Education Applications

Adult educators, especially adult literacy teachers, find authentic assessments especially appealing as an alternative to the problematic use of standardized tests with adults. Workplace literacy programs are particularly rooted in the context of the job site; Bousquet et al. (1994) describe a workplace assessment in which participants are given a scenario depicting a work-related situation—choosing among two job offers—and must make a choice, explain their strategy for choosing it, give supporting facts, and state why the alternative was not chosen. The scoring rubric has five major categories: understands scenario, demonstrates strategy, performs calculations, arrives at solution, writes response. Each category has subcriteria that are scored on three levels; e.g., under "understands scenario" are distinguishes relevant/irrelevant facts, identifies relationships among facts, draws inferences, mentions external factors.

A career education example is the Employability Skills Portfolio (Stemmer, Brown, and Smith 1992) used in Michigan schools. The portfolios contain evidence of students' attainment of academic skills, personal management behaviors such as meeting deadlines and working without supervision, and teamwork skills such as listening and compromise. Students update their portfolios throughout high school in consultation with parents and counselors, and local business representatives review them and provide feedback that helps students identify and improve weaknesses in their employment potential.

Vocational education has a long tradition of activity-based learning and product assessment (Custer 1994). In a business communication course (Fitch 1993), high school students define and create a business and are evaluated on innovation, creativity, following directions, writing, and format. Each student prepares a scenario describing the business; a spreadsheet showing products and profit; a job description and resume for a prospective employee; a database of positions and salaries; a letter of complaint and response letter (on student-designed letterheads with logos); and a biweekly company newsletter. Fitch shows how this ambitious project enables assessment of integrated skills, allows both high- and low-ability students to succeed, and draws upon the resources of the business community.

Some Advice for Implementation

It should be clear that authentic assessments must be carefully designed and evaluation criteria rigorously selected. Among the characteristics of good AAs are the following: (Custer 1994; Rudner and Boston 1994):

- Engaging, meaningful, worthy problems or tasks that match the content and outcomes of instruction
- Real-life applicability
- Multistaged—demonstrations of knowing, knowing why, and knowing how
- Emphasis on product and process, conveying that both development and achievement matter
- Rich, multidimensional, varied formats, both on-demand (in-class essays) and cumulative (portfolios)
- Opportunities for learner self-evaluation
- Cognitive complexity—requiring higher order thinking skills
- Clear, concise, and openly communicated standards
- Fairness in scoring procedures and their application

To ensure that assessment and instruction are linked, they should be planned at the same time. The following questions can guide planning (Reif 1995; Rudner and Boston 1994): What should learners know and be able to do? What cognitive, affective, and metacognitive skills should they demonstrate? What types of problems or tasks involve those skills? What concepts or principles should be applied in performing those tasks? What are the reasons for the assessment? What use will be made of the results? By whom? What criteria should be used?

One type of performance evaluation criteria are rubrics. Rubrics are scoring devices or tools that specify performance expectations and the various levels to which learners should perform (Custer 1994). Rubrics provide a framework that helps raters to be consistent, focuses the attention of assessor and assessee on important outcomes, and establish benchmarks for documenting progress. Rubrics feature (1) a stated standard, objective, behavior, or quality; (2) a rating scale; and (3) specific performance characteristics arranged in levels indicating the degree to which the standard has been met. Custer gives an example of a performance scenario or "design brief" used in technology education. The learner is asked to design an environmental control system for a room. The rubric lists eight criteria: number and quality of sources of information, number and quality of sources of supplies, ingenuity and creativity, use of design criteria, quality of documentation, workability of the system, quality of futures thinking, quality of the systems model, and remaining within budget. Each criterion is rated as exemplary, acceptable, or not yet acceptable.

Because alternative assessments take time to prepare, and because at best they should be learner centered and individualized, teachers should collaborate whenever possible in their development. Collaboration with employers and community members helps ensure the real-world authenticity of the tasks. Collaboration with students prepares them to be peer assessors and helps them develop responsibility for their learning. Before assessment, students can suggest creative alternatives and possible criteria; during assessment, teacher-learner interaction can bring out deeper understanding; and afterward, teachers and learners can reflect on the results to identify individual patterns of progress and new directions.

References

Borthwick, A. "Body of Evidence." *Vocational Education Journal* 70, no. 3 (March 1995): 24-26, 48.

Bousquet, J.; Fleming, T.; and Lloyd, N. "Authentic Assessment in Workplace Education Programs." Conference paper, November 1994.

Custer, R. L. ***Performance-Based Education Implementation Handbook.*** Columbia: Instructional Materials Lab, University of Missouri, 1994.

Fitch, S. ***Outcome Based Alternative Assessment.*** Maine Center for Educational Services, 1993. (ED 362 573)

Hayes, E. R.; Kretschmann, K. J.; and Berry, M. A. ***Portfolio Assessment in Adult Basic Skills Education.*** Madison: Madison Area Technical College, 1994. (ED 375 254)

Holt, D. D. ***Alternative Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation in Family English Literacy Programs.*** Sacramento: California Department of Education, 1992. (ED 351 365)

Jones, J. E. "Portfolio Assessment as a Strategy for Self-Direction in Learning." ***New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*** no. 64 (Winter 1994): 23-25.

Lazar, M. K., and Bean, R. M. ***Alternative Assessment Measures in Adult Basic Education Programs.*** Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1991. (ED 368 865)

MacIsaac, D., and Jackson, L. "Assessment Processes and Outcomes: Portfolio Construction." ***New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*** no. 62 (Summer 1994): 63-72. (EJ 492 393)

Reif, M. "Alternative Assessment for Adult Learners." ***Adult Learning*** 6, no. 3 (January-February 1995): 12-14.

Rudner, L. M., and Boston, C. "Performance Assessment." ***ERIC Review*** 3, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 2-12.

Stemmer, P.; Brown, B.; and Smith, C. "The Employability Skills Portfolio." ***Educational Leadership*** 49, no. 6 (March 1992): 32-35. (EJ 441 170)

Developed with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RR93002001. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department. *Digests* may be freely reproduced.

CENTER ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1900 KENNY ROAD • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210